

May 15, 1970

Dr. Kurt Loewit
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Dear Dr. Loewit:

Your letter of April 17 has reached me after some delay, owing to the illness of one of the staff people at Current Contents.

I will not attempt to recapitulate all of the many heavily ventilated arguments pro and con abortion with which we are both familiar, and which lead in the long run to a personal moral conclusion.

The specific point that I wish to make beyond the already well discussed arguments was the relationship between the legal control of abortion and the general position of the state in questions of human reproduction. I believe it essential to establish an ethos of private responsibility in this area as the only way to forfend the possibility of a wide range of statist intrusions in questions of human genetics and generation.

I would go further, however, with the remark that a high incidence of abortion is an accomplished fact and that this being the case, I would prefer that they be legal, procedures, rather than illegal, and that they be available on a non-discriminatory basis rather than merely to the sophisticated and the affluent. This position is similar to that which many liberals take on a number of other opportunities for self-abuse where legal regulation is simply an inappropriate and ineffective method of securing a goal that may be socially or morally important.

I hope you do not think that I advocate abortion on a large scale as the ideal solution to various social problems. However, I do believe that it is important that we bring the question outside the arena of legal sanctions as a necessary point of departure for reaching to more fundamental levels. So of course I would agree with you that abortion is just the most superficial aspect of a much deeper problem. In this country, however, it has had very serious overtones of racial discrimination which have been a serious impediment to reaching more deeply.

I realize that you may have a more deepseated moral condemnation of abortion than I do, which may in turn reflect a difference of opinion about the definition of human life. I would simply urge that this matter be left to private moral

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decision rather than legal compulsion. Furthermore, I would be obliged to remind you of the dynamic changes of popular and official views on these questions, noting that the advocacy of contraception elicited almost identical reactions not so many years ago.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics